

Thomas Newman

Thomas Montgomery Newman (born October 20, 1955) is an American composer best known for his many film scores. He scored *The Shawshank Redemption* 1994, *American Beauty* 1999, *Erin Brockovich* 2000, *Finding Nemo* 2003, *Wall-E* 2008, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* 2012, *Skyfall* 2012, *Bridge of Spies* 2015 amongst his other films.

Wall-e

General Summary:

Thomas Newman's score for WALL·E is much like *Nemo* – a full orchestral affair, augmented by the usual wondrous array of peculiar instruments, which on this occasion includes a Valiha (a Madagascan zither), an Aeolian Windharp, Flexible Foam Pads, a Lateral Sponge Guitar, and a Strumming Zebra (whatever that is). Newman builds up layers of sound, interesting textures, beguiling rhythms, and occasional bursts of thematic beauty should be commended.

The opening “2815 AD” features spacey textures with a prominent harp element. “WALL·E” introduces the playful musical ideas for the central character, a bouncy combo of hooting woodwinds, pizzicato strings, and little whistling effects. It's a little Mickey mouse-ish in its construction, but in a way it's a typical Newman piece, in which rhythm and texture is more important than melody, but suits the playful, inquisitive nature of WALL·E well. By contrast, the theme for “EVE” is warm and romantic, with lush string writing and a rolling harp accompaniment.

As is often the case with Newman scores, a lot of the cues are little more than brief bumpers, many lasting less than a minute in length, with one or two as short as 14 seconds. It's difficult to gain a full appreciation for the score when it changes tone and style so rapidly.

Nevertheless, there are still many moments in which the score excels. The pop-cheese love theme in “First Date”, complete with retro ‘ba-ba-ba’ vocalizations, is a throwback to those Euro-romances of the 1970s scored by people like Bacharach, Lai and Bachelet. The unexpected brass-led action music in “EVE Retrieve” is exciting and quite superb. The sweeping string themes in “The Axiom” and “Define Dancing” are a delight, and are reminiscent of a space-bound version of the finale of *The Shawshank Redemption*, albeit with a sweeter, more innocent flavor.

Cues such as “Foreign Contaminant” and “WALL·E's Pod Adventure” continue the light-hearted excitement, but towards the end of the score the whole thing actually turns into something of an action-caper, with several back-to-back action cues, with churning strings, a fizz-pop synth undercurrent, and some surprisingly ominous brass hits. Highlights here include “Mutiny!”, “Rogue Robots”, “The Holo-Detector”, the exciting “Hyperjump” and the florid “Desperate EVE”. Every tinkle, every string pluck, and every percussion hit is rendered with perfect clarity by the sound engineers.

The score is augmented by two songs from Jerry Herman's Broadway hit “Hello Dolly!”, both performed by Michael Crawford, a classic Louis Armstrong English-language performance of the standard “La Vie En Rose”, and a new original song by Newman and Peter Gabriel, entitled “Down to Earth”, which can probably be best described as ‘folk-rock’.

More specific guide with reference to Theme Locations in the movie.

The movie *Wall-e* was produced in 2008. The story essentially takes place in the year 2805 and follows a robot named Wall-e whose job it is to clean up garbage left by the humans who left earth due to its unsustainability. The film heavily relies on music and sound effects, and is 98 minutes long, while the soundtrack takes up 61 minutes, with repeated figures throughout the film.

Newman's style of composing differs from many composers, but is similar in several ways to Herrmann and Zimmer. Max Steiner and Hugo Friedhofer tended to have a theme for every character (traditional *Leitmotif*). Newman does not have character themes per se, but associates a character and their behaviour to certain instrumentation and miniature motifs. This allows the music to add to the story as a character's feelings can be expressed through even when not present.

Like Steiner in *King Kong*, Newman shows emotions that Wall-e feels, through certain instruments. For example, when Wall-e is exploring his surroundings, being curious, or when Newman wants to suggest sheer innocence, an oboe motif followed by a whistle is heard. (00:10:17). This whistle (00:10:35) is also heard lightly when Wall-e shares his favourite things with Eve. She is exposed to new things, becomes curious about objects (like the lighter) and has a sense of innocence (00:24:40). This whistling motif with the rhythm section of this theme reoccurs when Wall-e tries to teach another robot how to wave hello, in itself bringing out his own child-like innocence (00:43:25).

Instead of using strong repeated character themes with variations, Newman uses minimal character themes mixed with event music. This means that motifs or themes are often sparsely placed throughout the movie, and don't necessarily play every time a character comes back into focus. When Wall-e discovers Eve, she has her own music to accompany her movement and grace (00:16:45). Both Newman and Peter Gabriel worked on the music of Eve. Newman said that he wanted to use high strings to make the music appear more feminine.

This music is used again later on in the film with a slight entrance variation when Eve is dancing with Wall-e (00:59:50). Since Peter Gabriel created the ending credits song (rebuilding the earth), he wanted to re-use motifs from the movie in his song so that it had familiarity for the audience and allowed his song to blend in with Newman's previous work (01:30:20). Gabriel therefore borrowed the bass and drum figures from both Eve's introductory music and the dancing scene to use in his final piece, making Eve's "theme" appear for a total of three times throughout the film.

There is also a theme for the earth and Wall-e's workday that is carefully placed and timed. This theme appears when the audience is first exposed in detail to the garbage-ridden earth with its neatly-organized skyscrapers of rubbish (00:03:26). This music introduces Wall-e and the job that Wall-e has as a trash compactor. During this piece the audience realizes Wall-e's isolation, as he is the only functioning robot left and is surrounded by "dead" wall-e robots. The accompanying music is very suitable for such a grim scene. It begins with the harp containing the melody, like many other pieces of Newman's, against very legato strings and eerie background sound effects. The piece is dark and chilling with its cold echoing effects that emphasize the isolation Wall-e faces on earth.

There is a moment (00:06:11) when the heaviness of the piece is lifted, much like the dust clouds on earth, where the glockenspiel (innocence) is heard. Suddenly the music becomes warm and friendly, as if to state that the world can be a pleasant place for someone of such a warm personality like Wall-e. He sees it as his home and a place of new discoveries, for it is after this music that the playful Wall-e theme enters as he explores the treasures in the trash.

This lightened music also occurs when the audience is exposed to Wall-e's home, a place filled with interesting trinkets and objects that Wall-e has collected over the years. The only other time that this earth theme appears is when Wall-e temporarily leaves Eve to return to work compacting trash into cubes and the camera shows the mounds of garbage that Wall-e has organized (00:31:40)

Another common musical motif is heard whenever a machine or object comes into the picture that was recently developed by the humans. The motif is a strong, blistering horn fanfare with high strings that, possibly boast a sense of pride in the technology that the humans have been able to develop and use successfully. Examples of this are found when Eve's spaceship first lands to earth (00:33:23), and when Wall-e sees the Axiom ship for the first time (00:35:15).

There is another musical tie that is used for the humans. This time the musical tie is about the humans themselves instead of their creations. This motif is not as strong and triumphant like the horn fanfare, but is instead bouncy...perhaps to emphasize how soft the human race has become. Just after we are introduced to the humans, we see them on hovering chairs that move them around. The music accompanies us as we explore the Axiom and all of its features and also accompanies the movement of the humans in their chairs (00:39:45).

This same musical motif is reintroduced when the humans' chairs have been programmed to gather them towards the centre of the Axiom (01:19:20). This music once again accompanies the humans' movements through the ship's centre. It is important to note that this is not necessarily a character theme, as it does not revolve around one character or characters. It acts as background music that makes the audience familiar with the human's movements and characteristics.

Newman's instrumentation is important. Although he uses a typical orchestral setting, he also uses electronic instruments like an electronic bass and guitar. He also features a plucked harp for most of his melodies and often makes changes from classical instrumentation to electronic synthesized music and sound effects. An example of this shift and harmonic plucking can be found in the No Splashing scene (01:02:20) and synthesized bass in the Foreign Contaminant scene (00:39:30).

There are often moments where Newman alters instruments in such a way that it is hard to tell just what instrument or thing is making that sound. This sound alteration is considered to be a compositional trait of Newman, as he used similar effects in the *Finding Nemo* soundtrack. Newman blends in orchestral style with electronic music to complete this animated world of science fiction and robots. Using these mysterious sounds and added sound effects give an extra dimension of musical depth that compliments the robots, their sounds, and their environment.

The music is percussive, as a lot of percussion instruments are used. The harp also seems to be used for most of the melodies as well. However, there are a few numbers from the soundtrack that do not use heavy percussion, or feature heavily synthesized sections. For example, the song "First Date" (00:29:50) is light, good natured and similar to elevator music, and is one of the few songs that feature vocals. It explores the feelings that Wall-e has for Eve. The song has a light tempo and feel, and uses scat vocals. Newman uses a flute and glockenspiel (the instrument Newman uses later when Wall-e is dying (01:26:50), which possibly adds to the child-like innocence of Wall-e.

Another interesting piece that also features vocals is the "Buy N Large" theme song, which resembles a 1960's jingle. The vocals are barber shop quartet style but include female voices, while the lyrics promote the idea of a corporation making your life happy and complete. The piece was written by Newman and Bill Bernstein. The lyrics are as follows: "Buy N Large, it's your superstore. We've got all you need, and so much more. Happiness is what we sell, that's why everyone loves BnL". It also features guitar harmonics that add clarity, perfection, and friendliness to a message, from a mighty conglomerate which has stripped all competition and freedom of choice (00:03:55).

The song of M-O is interesting piece for several reasons. It is an excellent example of how sound effects are used within the music to enhance the character's robotic features and personality. It is also a jazz-like piece featuring jazz flute, piano, and vibes (00:51:55). It 'sneaks' around (like the Pink Panther), which works with M-O's character, as he follows Wall-e and cleans up after him.

There are only five instances where the film uses unoriginal music. Two of the unoriginal pieces come from Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which is said to have been a huge

influence to Andrew Stanton in the creation of Wall-e. One piece is the *Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss II. It plays in the background for a few seconds as the captain's workplace music (00:45:00). The second is Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. It is played as the captain tries to stand on his own two feet. The climax of the piece is reached when the captain is fully standing (01:22:05).

The third unoriginal piece is Louis Armstrong's *La vie En Rose*, which plays when Wall-e falls in love with Eve and is fascinated by her (00:19:40). He tries to keep his distance yet express his feelings for Eve through garbage-sculpting. This song is a good fit for the scene because it shows young love, the crazy things that love makes people do, and how beautiful life can be with the presence of love: "Hold me close and hold me fast, the magic spell you cast, this is la vie en rose." The words in this song discuss seeing colour, pink, and being in a world apart from the real one, one where roses bloom...this is fitting for Wall-e because the state of his world is grey and brown and roses haven't existed for hundreds of years. Eve lets Wall-e experience a whole new life just by her being there.

Love may be the one thing that drives Wall-e throughout the entire film, and it is fuelled by one song. At the start of the film we hear music from the 1969 musical *Hello Dolly!*. Michael Crawford's *Put on Your Sunday Clothes!* contains an enthusiastic voice that sings (as we gaze upon images of outer space including a swirling galaxy) "Out there...is a world outside of Yonkers...out there...full of shine and full of sparkle...close your eyes and see it glisten..." We see something glistening on the screen that turns out to be earth covered in satellites, sandstorms, and skyscrapers made of garbage.

While this bleak imagery is being shown, Crawford continues to sing about going downtown, living life to the fullest, and not coming home until finally kissing a girl. It is the idea of getting out into the world and finding adventure and romance that the story of Wall-e revolves around. He leaves earth with Eve and finds a whole new adventure, meets new friends, and lives his life to the fullest, even if he has lost half of his computer parts. The opening song gives an insight as to how Wall-e might narrate his own adventure. It's a way for Newman to give Wall-e a voice.

The song itself is repeated often by Wall-e as he has recorded it onto his built-in audio recorder and plays it while working. He hums the tune often, and replays the song from his VHS tape of *Hello Dolly!* while at home. While aboard the Axiom, the song is used as an alarm clock for the captain (00:44:23), and a rogue robot hears it, and paints divider lines to the rhythm of the song (00:55:42).

The film is tied together by the reoccurring piece (also from *Hello Dolly!*) *It Only Takes A Moment*. The song is first exposed to Wall-e through the VHS tape he has of *Hello Dolly!* (00:07:35), and then it is repeated throughout the movie through Wall-e himself (he records it into his built in audio player so he can replay it), and by other characters including Eve. Shortly after Wall-e is exposed to this song, he goes outside to clean his lunchbox and sees an opening in the clouds revealing the stars. Instead of playing *Put On Your Sunday Clothes!*, the song originally associated with glittering stars, Wall-e plays, *It Only Takes A Moment*, (00:08:15). It is as if he replaces the idea of adventure through discovering all the fancy things in life, with adventure becoming a quest for love. This "love theme" is repeated through the film from Wall-e's playback system whenever he wants to hold Eve's hand.

Eve revisits her memory of the *It Only Takes A Moment Scene* through her activated security camera playback, and begins to understand the concept of hand-holding (01:05:11). Near the end of the film Eve tries to get Wall-e back to his normal self after several computer parts within him have been replaced. As Wall-e is unresponsive, Eve tries to jog Wall-e's memory by pressing the play button on his built-in playback system, but the system is blank. Eve then hums the *It Only Takes A Moment* song to Wall-e, and proceeds to hold his hand. She gives Wall-e a kiss through a small electric shock, which is eventually what brings him back to life. (01:28:00). The clip from *Hello Dolly!* plays on Wall-e's TV back at his place, and the movie ends with this song.

There are miniature themes. Even the plant from earth has a four-note motif. Most of the themes, aside from the music from *Hello Dolly!* rarely occur. These themes are often only repeated twice, unlike Max Steiner and Hugo Friedhofer's work. There is a deeper meaning for music in the film.

Skyfall

Cross-Pollination of the “Skyfall” Song and the Score

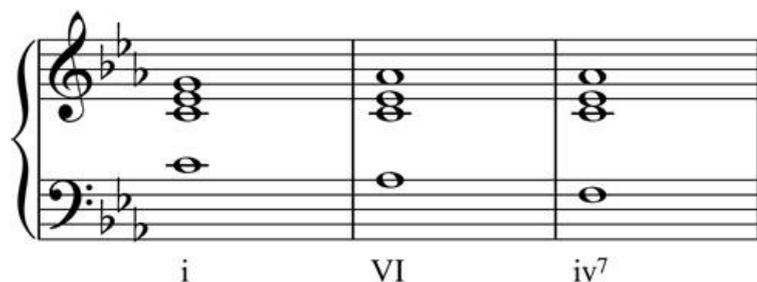
The relationship between the Skyfall Song and the Film Score

Much praise has been lavished on the film’s title song both for Adele’s highly expressive performance and for the song itself—indeed, it has earned Adele and Paul Epworth an Oscar nomination for Best Original Song. Even though the song is not part of the film’s original score, it deserves mention because there is much in common between the music of the song and of the film.

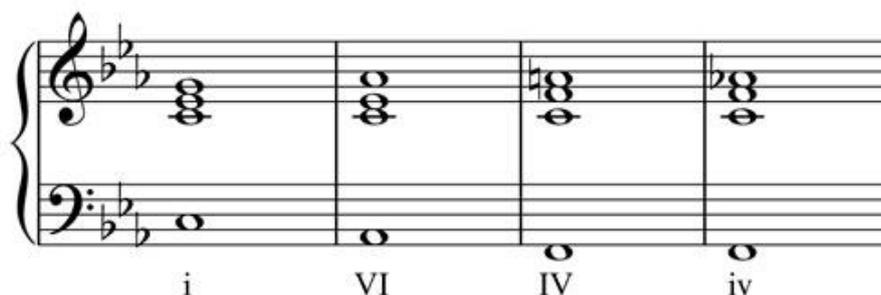


The song both begins and ends with a sustained version of the minor add-9 chord that begins the famous gun-barrel sequence in Bond films. It creates an instant connection with the music of the whole franchise and informs us that what we are about to hear is not just any song, but specifically a James Bond song.

The Bond sound, however, is worked into the “Skyfall” song in a more fundamental way. After the add-9 chord, we hear a repeated three-chord progression in C minor: i-VI-iv⁽⁷⁾.



At first, there is nothing strange about the progression as it is a fairly standard one in pop, but when the rest of the band enters (electric guitar, bass guitar, and drums), the progression changes a bit to i-VI-IV-iv. That is, the last chord becomes a major chord before returning to its original minor form:



This change allows the guitar to sound the notes G-Ab-A-Ab in harmony with the progression, as shown in the top line of the example above. The resulting four-note motive is recognizable in Bond films. It accompanies the gun-barrel sequence that slyly glides up and down chromatically, and which some have appropriately called the “suspense theme”. When this motive appears in Bond films, it is usually over an unchanging harmony (again, recall the gun-barrel sequence):



When we finally do get the iconic gun-barrel sequence at the end of the film, it is heard in the jazz-band scoring of previous Bond films.

Incidentally, it should be noted that this sequence is not always scored in precisely the same way since the guitar's low-pitched melody has been played by various instruments. As Jeff Smith points out in *The Sounds of Commerce*:

“Often these small variations in the orchestration are done to accommodate more global patterns of instrumentation within the individual Bond score. The shrill and brassy sound of *Goldfinger*'s “Bond Is Back,” for example, is consistent with the brighter instrumental textures of the score as a whole. In contrast, *A View to a Kill* begins with a more somber rendering of the Bond theme, that conforms to the score's overall emphasis on traditional orchestral forces, particularly low brass and strings.”

Within the film proper, the most prominent use of the old-style scoring occurs when Bond takes M to his Aston Martin and drives her to Scotland to flee from the villain Silva. The music begins when M resigns herself to getting in the car. The music plays The James Bond theme - the very same music as in the gun-barrel sequence. Its appearance here, in the '60s-style scoring, is the perfect accompaniment to the '60s Aston Martin that Bond was first given in the *Goldfinger*. Bond verbally emphasizes this connection with the past in this scene when M asks him where they are going, to which he replies, “Back in time. Somewhere where *we*’ll have the advantage.”

Homage to Hans Zimmer

Newman's score is not limited to his own musical style, nor that of previous Bond films. In one scene, he pays homage to Hans Zimmer by referencing his Batman themes from the *Dark Knight* films. The scene in *Skyfall* shows Bond in Shanghai following Patrice, the man who made off with the all-important list containing the identities of undercover British agents. Patrice, on his way to carrying out an assassination, takes an elevator up a high-rise. Just as the elevator begins to ascend, Bond dashes over to it, leaps up, and hangs from its bottom, unnoticed by Patrice (in a glass elevator!).

This heroic act is accompanied musically by two themes in D minor, Batman's key in Zimmer's *Dark Knight* scores. The first theme takes after a theme we hear near the start of *The Dark Knight*, and the second is a very close emulation of Batman's “heroic” theme (see [Part 1](#) of *Dark Knight* posts), which sounds the progression i-VI, with the second chord being blasted out from the brass instruments. Newman even uses a very similar accompaniment to Zimmer's repeating F-F-D-D pattern as a background for the themes. Compare the two below:

First theme of Zimmer's quoted (from 0:10-0:19):

Second theme of Zimmer's quoted (from 2:31-2:45):

Newman's themes in *Skyfall* (from 0:00):

Why does Newman pay homage to Zimmer in this particular scene? It likely has to do with the fact that Bond is ascending—or rising—while doing something heroic. The act of rising is a major component of *The Dark Knight Rises*, especially where Bruce Wayne climbs heroically out of a prison built inside a pit. In that scene, we hear the same “heroic” Batman theme (see [Part 5](#) of those posts for a full discussion of the climbing scene). Newman's homage to Zimmer therefore occurs at a place in *Skyfall* that, at least in an abstract way, parallels the *Dark Knight* films through its images. There is also the possibility that it is more of an inside joke to those who know the *Dark Knight* music, as if to say “Oh look! Bond is Batman!” Whatever the reason, the use of Zimmer's themes is one of the new elements that Newman brings to his *Skyfall* score.

The original of this analysis (with sound clips) is at:

<http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/oscar-nominees-2013-thomas-newmans-score-for-skyfall/>

American Beauty

This film works on three different layers which are thoroughly followed by Newman's score. These are: 1) the representation of real elements, such as geographical and social characteristics, 2) the representation of the surreal, that is Lester Burnham's daydreams and sexual fantasies about the teenager Angela, and finally, 3) a layer that functions in between the two, which engenders visual and acoustic elements of the first two.

Newman's score follows this subdivision musically, using very interesting compositional choices, which I highlighted in the examples above.

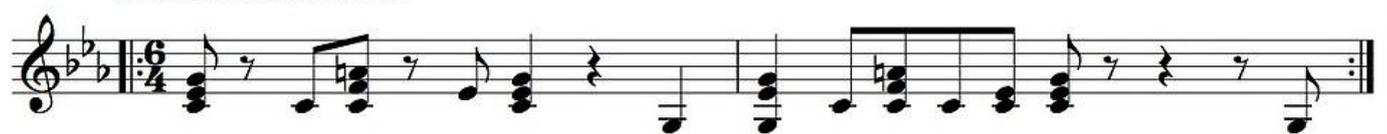
Starting with Ex 1 ("Dead Already", the opening cue), we can see the main feature of the whole score, the use of patterns of repetition in a minimalistic fashion. The use of mallet instruments, although following a precise request by director Mendes, is also redolent of the patterns used by minimalists such as Steve Reich or Philip Glass. Nevertheless this is only a simplistic view of this music, for there is a fundamental difference between the two styles.

In his article 'Thankless Attempt at a Definition of Minimalism', Kyle Gann attempts to define the main characteristics of minimalism in music and lists twelve peculiarities in minimalist composition, which include the use of static harmony, repetition, an additive process, a steady beat and linear transformation. He also adds 'No minimalist piece makes use of all these, but I could hardly imagine calling a piece minimalist that did not use at least a few of them'.

Therefore, we cannot label Newman's score as minimalistic, for the simple reason that he does not make use of any of these compositional tools in the same way minimalists do. For example, the use of patterns is not continuous throughout the score, but it is interrupted by the use of silence and it is very often re-orchestrated to give freshness of timbre and to follow the scenes.

Ex.1.1 : 'Dead Already' (extr.) (repeated Marimba patterns)

Pattern 1: Marimba I repeated 14 times throughout the cue



Pattern 2: Marimba I, II repeated 17 times throughout the cue



What is more, Newman also juxtaposes other parts on top of this pattern, using a well varied instrumentation (appalachian dulcimer, tabla, saz just to name a few).

Ex.1.2 : 'Dead Already' (extr.) (examples of additive process)

The musical score for Ex.1.2 illustrates an additive process across five systems. The first system features Marimbas I, II and Kim-Kim drums. The second system adds Marimba I, Dulcimer, and Tabla (pitched). The third system introduces Marimba I, Dulcimer, and Tabla or sim. The fourth system adds Bass (sounds 8vb). The fifth system combines Kim-Kim drums and Tabla. The score is written in 6/8 time with a key signature of two sharps (D major).

This additive process is shown in Ex 2, where other ostinati are added to the main Marimba parts. Harmonically, this is all built on a C Dorian scale (second degree of Bb major) confirmed by the typical alternation between the minor triad on the tonic and the major triad on the subdominant. Rather than calling it harmony, we should speak here of a cycle of two repeating chords. This simplicity is opposed to the richness and variety of timbres used throughout the whole cue, which derive from the composer's experimentations in the recording studios with his fellow musicians.

In my essay I called this 'minimalism of means' rather than pure minimalism. This is not just a matter of nomenclature, but it is a fundamental characteristic of the whole score, as we will see later on.

Ex.1.3 : 'Lunch with the King' (extr.) (thematic material over additive process)

The musical score for Ex.1.3 shows thematic material over an additive process across five systems. The first system features Piano. The second system adds Mandola or Ac. Gtr. strum. The third system adds Xylophone and Marimba. The fourth system adds Bass (sounds 8vb). The fifth system includes a double bar line with a repeat sign (//) and the instruction 'Xylo, Mari repeat throughout'. The score is written in 6/8 time with a key signature of two sharps (D major).

In the example 1.3, from the cue "Lunch With the King", we can see how Newman uses a very simple piano theme, built on the E mixolydian mode. Harmonically, the bass plays an ostinato on the modal tonic, while the piano makes use of the A major scale pitch collection. This is an example of the use of thematic - rather than motivic - material in the process of accumulation.

Ex.2.1 : 'Spartanette' (extr.) (sliding pitches and microtonal inflections)

The musical score for 'Spartanette' (extr.) is presented in four staves, all in 4/4 time. The top staff is for Lap Steel (sounds 8vb) and synth Flute sound, featuring glissando markings. The second staff is a Drone, consisting of a sustained low note. The third staff is for Steel drum or hand pan, showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplet markings. The bottom staff is for Fretless Bass, featuring a simple bass line with a glissando marking.

Example 2.1 is drawn from the cue "Spartanette", where Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) sees Angela (Mena Suvari) for the first time and imagines rose petals coming from her breast while she is dancing with the school cheerleaders.

With regard to the second level of representation mentioned earlier, that is surrealism:

According to director Mendes and director of photography Conrad Hall, some of the visual choices they made were influenced by Belgian surrealist painter Renee Magritte. Magritte was somehow different from the other surrealists because he used ordinary objects in combinations which evoked a state of daydream. As a by-product of this juxtaposition, we are able to reconsider such objects, which are part of our everyday lives, thus being able to see the world with a different perspective, as we were kids contemplating the world for the first time.

In the cheer-leaders scene, the reality is bent over: there is a precise moment when Lester delves into daydream; during this very moment, Newman's cue breaks in. As we can see in Ex 2, there is an overall abundance of sliding sounds (lap steel guitar, synth flute, fretless bass) and one fixed sound to counterbalance this kind of 'slippery ground' which is daydream.

This uncertainty of pitch is what musically follows this shift into Lester's imagination: as a Western audience, we are accustomed to well-pitched sounds and instruments and that is our ordinary, daily experience of music (noise does not come into account when talking about our music). This is confirmed by the tendency in music production to use tools such as Melodyne or Autotune to correct vocal performances and get near to perfect intonation. Thus, shifts in intonation in this cue suggest that we are experiencing a world that is not real and in which something unnatural is happening.

Ex.2.2 : 'Choking The Bishop' (extr.) (detuning)

Mandolins I, II (detuned)

Mandolin III (detuned)

Lap Steel Guitar

Fretless Bass

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

Another approach to the same problem is Newman's use of detuning. In Ex 2.2 from the cue "Choking The Bishop", the composer uses ostinati of detuned mandolins to accompany Angela bathing in roses. Of course, this transcription is an approximation of what is actually going on in the music, nevertheless we can easily notice the use of a diminished triad that clashes with the chord in Mandolin III. Again, there is a wide use of sliding pitches.

Ex.2.3 : 'Root Beer' (extr.) (unresolving bass glissando)

Drone

Steel pan drum

Taz (strumming)

Fretless Bass

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

In Ex 2.3 we can observe another compositional tool used in the surrealistic scenes, the use of unresolving lines. In the "Root Beer" cue - again, another fantasy about Angela drinking beer near the fridge - something very interesting is going on. Firstly, there is an alternative way of defining a tonic: in this passage, the pitch Bb can be clearly identified as being a pole of attraction for the other sounds. This is not set up by harmonic movement as usually happens in tonal music, but it is set by repetition of this pitch, notably by the use of a fixed drone on Bb. Tension is thus created by the fretless bass line that does not resolve to the 'tonic': we hear that it is hovering around that frequency, but it is not going to end up on that, causing an upsetting reaction in the listener.

Ex.3.1 : 'American Beauty' (extr.) (modal texture, drones and shifting meters)

The musical score for Ex. 3.1 consists of two systems. The first system includes three staves: Piano, Synth drones, and Strings. The Piano part features a melodic line with appoggiaturas and a harmonic accompaniment of parallel fifths. The Synth drones part consists of sustained notes. The Strings part provides a low-frequency accompaniment. The second system continues the Piano and Synth drones parts, showing a change in meter from 4/4 to 2/4 and back to 4/4.

Ex 3.1 is a transcription of the cue accompanying the famous bag scene. This cue can be considered as a way to represent musically a surrealistic scene that is in fact happening in reality. Here, harmonic unity is provided by the same modal chords that appeared in "Dead Already", Cm and F (add6/9), with some appoggiaturas that create inner movement. The use of different time signatures is obviously dictated by filmic needs, nevertheless it conveys a sense of 'timelessness'. Again, there is an interesting use of drones in the synth parts. Also, note the use of parallel fifths in the piano part, which are redolent of early 20th Century piano music (Satie, Debussy...).

Finally, in Ex. 3.2 (below) we observe an even simpler piano texture. The counterpoint between the first two staves is minimal, nevertheless it is very effective. The lower part is contrapuntally correct in their use of contrary motion and resolving appoggiaturas over a very simple evocative theme. This is "Angela Undress" cue, a resolving point in the plot: Lester finds out that his fantasies on the 'provocative' teenager Angela are in fact a figment of his imagination, because the girl is still a virgin.

The use of drones is particularly interesting here, because the sonic elements involved in this practice are not limited to musical sounds. The rain pouring outside the Burnhams' mansion can be considered as a grainy texture, a kind of drone that resonates throughout the whole scene. Additionally, Angela's breath can also be seen - with some imagination - as a pulsating drone, even if with an irregular rhythmic activity. This is an interesting way of reading a film scene, because in many occasions music analysis is limited to the study of notes, textures and instrumentation, whereas the cinematic medium is a visual and sonic world, used by elements of both dimensions

Ex.3.2 : 'Angela Undress' (extr.) (themes and use of drones)

Piano (First Theme)

Synth 1 (airy sound)

Synth 2 (breathy)

Synth 3

rit.

Synth 4 (whistle)

Piano (Second Theme)

Strings

Str.

Detailed description: This musical score is divided into three systems. The first system features a piano part with a melody in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand. Below it are three synth parts: Synth 1 (airy sound) with a long note, Synth 2 (breathy) with a long note, and Synth 3 with a rhythmic pattern. The second system continues the piano melody, which ends with a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking. Synth 4 (whistle) is introduced with a rhythmic pattern. The third system shows the piano's second theme, which is more melodic and active. Below it, a string part (labeled 'Str.') provides harmonic support with sustained chords.